

# LIVING & ARTS



Members of the Menotomy Minute Men fife and drum corps play during Patriots Day ceremonies in 1993.

## Arlington's longest day

Revolution began with fiercest fighting in Menotomy

By Ralph W. Sexton  
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

**W**hen we celebrate Patriot's Day, we should not forget that we Arlingtonians are celebrating the largest and most ferocious battle of the first day of the American Revolution.

Minutemen from as far north as Danvers and as far south as Dedham hurried to Menotomy (now Arlington) to ambush the British regulars, or redcoats, on their retreat from Concord to Boston. More than 5,000 men fought bitterly in our town on that memorable day. We can visualize the battle's ferocity by noting that one-half of the day's casualties occurred in the short distance from Foot of the Rocks to Spy Pond.

The day began quietly but ominously for Menotomy people, who, in the wee hours of April 19, 1775, watched with apprehension as the redcoats marched through their village; apprehensive because everyone knew that the only reason for the regulars to be out in the middle of the night — and on that particular route — was to destroy the provincial military supplies stored in Concord. The residents knew also what might happen if someone tried to stop them.

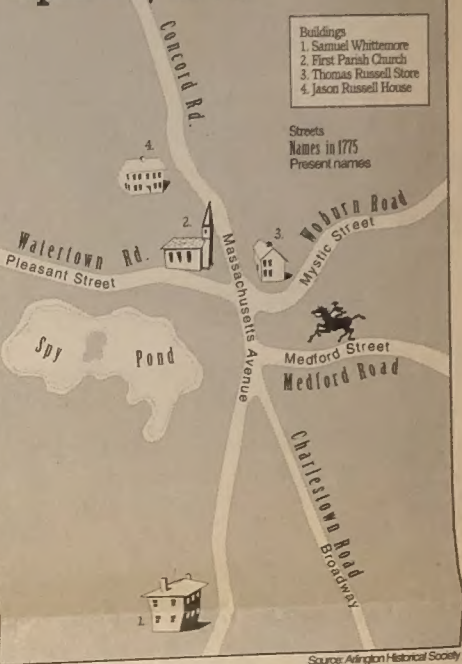
### Village not asleep

The regulars were apprehensive, too, because they sensed more activity going on than was proper for a village that was supposed to be asleep. When they saw a light, they demanded to know why anyone should be up at that hour. At the Blackhorse Tavern, they surprised three members of the Committee of Safety, Vice President Elbridge Gerry and two colonels, who were sleeping over from a meeting held there the day before. These men had to flee out the back door, and escaped by hiding in some corn stubble.

At one Arlington home, the wife satisfied the soldiers by telling them that she was making tea for her sick husband. Actually, however, the couple had been melting powder plates to make musket balls, and when they heard the knock on the door, the wife upset the pot of molten powder in the fireplace, and the man dove into the bed. It was about this time that the British commander, Lt. Col. Francis Smith, made a decision that, as it turned out, later saved him and his men from total destruction. Realizing by then that the countryside was aroused, and knowing that he was bound to lead his small contingent to Concord, he sent a messenger back to superiors in Boston for reinforcements.

There are two excellent sources for information on what happened in Menotomy on that crucial day. Gen. John R. Galvin, in his book "The Minute Men: The First Fight," and the Minute Men, "The First Fight: Myths & Realities of the American Revolution" (Pergamon-Brassley's International Defense Publishers Inc. 1989), devotes a chapter to the Battle of Menotomy in great detail.

## The Ambush — April 19, 1775



Buildings  
1. Samuel Whittemore  
2. First Parish Church  
3. Thomas Russell Store  
4. Jason Russell House

Streets  
Names in 1775  
Present names

Source: Arlington Historical Society

Of course, there also is the well-known book "West Cambridge 1775," by the Rev. Samuel Abbott Smith. Reprints are sold by the Arlington Historical Society. At the time the book was published in 1864, Arlington was called West Cambridge.

### Word of attack spreads

Col. Smith led his men to Lexington, and after the encounter there and during the march to Concord, he became acutely aware that the countryside was filling up with minutemen. The messenger system (Paul Revere and dozens of others), organized by the Committee of Safety, had spread the word to surrounding towns, and would continue to do so all day. After destroying whatever stores he could find in Concord and becoming aware that the situation was getting more dangerous every minute for the safety of his men, Col. Smith prudently decided to begin the march back to Boston. Almost immediately, the minutemen harassed the regulars, firing at them from behind stone walls, buildings, and whatever else afforded them cover.

Meanwhile, early in the morn-

ing, the Menotomy minutemen mobilized according to previously arranged plans, and proceeded to Lexington under the command of Capt. Benjamin Locke. Galvin says that the Menotomy company was part of a militia regiment comprised of several companies from the surrounding towns that followed the British began their retreat. The Menotomy men did their part to hamper their progress. They fought the regulars all the way through Menotomy and to Charlestown.

While this was going on, the reinforcements asked for by Col. Smith arrived in Menotomy. The march through Roxbury, Brookline, and across the Charles River to Cambridge and into Menotomy was in silence, Galvin says that Lord Percival, the commander of the reinforcements, noted in his report that "...all the houses were shut up and there was not the appearance of a single inhabitant." That is, until they got to Menotomy, as, according to the Rev. Smith, a little girl, Nabby Blackington, innocently walked through the red-coated BATTLE, see page 6B.

## Annual parade marks Patriot's Day

Arlington's Patriot's Day activities — commemorating the start of the American Revolution — begins Monday morning at 9:30 a.m. as the annual parade steps off on Massachusetts Avenue between Appleton and Acton streets.

The theme of this year's parade is "Arlington-Menotomy 1775: First in the Fight for Freedom — Still in the Forefront."

Dignitaries expected to participate include Gov. William Weld; U.S. Sen. John Kerry and U.S. Rep. Joseph Kennedy.

Also appearing will be a unit from the Arlington Feed Cooperative and several units from Arlington Lodge 1435, Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, who will sponsor several contingents from the Aleppo Temple Shriners from Wilmington.

Among the numerous fife and drum corps will be Arlington's own Menotomy Minute Men musicians and the Acton Minute Men fife and drums. The Minute Men will be carrying the town flag for the first time. They arranged to have it made, and have also presented on to the state of Massachusetts for display in the Hall of Flags in the State House.

### Proclamation

Eagle Scout Robbie Ford, of Troop 368, will read Gov. William F. Weld's Proclamation of Patriot's Day, at the 9:30 a.m. exercises on Town Hall Plaza, following a concert by the Arlington High School band.

Ford is the son of Janet and William Ford, and has lived in Arlington all his life. He attended Dallin Elementary School and Otis Junior High School, and is now a senior at Arlington High School, where he has served on the Student Advisory Council. He is a member of the National Honor Society, and was a finalist in the National Merit Scholarship competition.

He earned his Eagle badge in February. His project was building a garden with raised beds at the Dallin School so that physically-challenged second-graders could enjoy gardening with others in their classes.

He is a member of the High School Band and Jazz Band, the Drama Club, and the Gilbert and Sullivan Club, participating in the recent production of "Fiddler on the Roof."

In addition to his school activities, he works at the Capitol Theater and the Arlington Weatherization office, and is a member of St. John's Episcopal

Church, where he serves as an acolyte. He is considering a college major of either engineering or biology.

### Grand Marshal Trembly

The Grand Marshal will be Emma Jane Trembly, a member of the Patriot's Day Committee for more than 20 years, and a past regent of the now-disbanded Menotomy Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution; she is now a member of the Joseph Coolidge Chapter, DAR. She chose to transfer to this chapter because she is descended from John Coolidge, a selectman in Watertown in 1635, and has a number of friends in the Joseph Coolidge chapter. She was born and grew up in Hancock, N.H., where she attended the local elementary school and graduated from Hancock High School. After working as a secretary for several years, she attended the New England Conservatory of Music, graduating with a diploma in organ music. She became organist at First United Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, where she met and, in 1952, married Gray C. Trembly. After time off because of the arrival of Anna and Edward Trembly, she resumed the duties of organist in 1979.

She and her husband are members of First United Presbyterian Church. In addition to being organist, Trembly taught Sunday School for more than 25 years, mostly in the interim of her duties as organist. In addition to their two children, they have five grandchildren.

The Tremblys have lived in Arlington since their marriage. He has been a Scoutmaster in Cambridge for more than 35 years.

### Marshals Meeting

The meeting of the marshals of the Patriot's Day Parade will be held on Saturday, April 13, at 9:30 a.m. in the hearing room of the Community Safety Building on Mystic Street, when they will be given their final instructions concerning the ordering of the parade. All marshals are urged to attend.

Marshals are as follows: Division I — Jay Vann, John D. Sullivan and Jack Sisk; Division II — Joseph S. Daley; Division III — Brigadier-General John F. McCauley; Division IV-A — Jim and Terry Doherty; Division IV-B — Frank "Jiggs" Miller; Division V-A — Girl Scouts of America representative (to be chosen); Division V-B — Boy Scouts of America representative (to be chosen); Division VI — Chris Gibbons.

## Coming EVENTS

### 'Man from La Mancha' at Regent Theatre

A Waltham troupe's production of "Man from La Mancha" will be revived for a second run, this time at the Regent Theatre. "La Mancha" is scheduled to be the first production of the newly born Mes Amis Theatre Company in residence at the theater, taking many cast members from last year's production by the Hovey Players. "Man from La Mancha" opens at Regent Theatre at 7 Medford St. on April 25 and runs April 27, 28 and May 2-5. Curtain time is 8 p.m. for all performances except the Sunday matinee, which starts at 2 p.m. General admission is \$10, \$12 for elders and \$8 for students and children under 20. General admission for Thursday and Sunday performances is \$14.

For more information and reservations on other productions upcoming at Regent Theatre call 642-0401.

### Folk singer to perform at local Coffee House

Nashville singer-songwriter Hunter Moore will be performing at the Red Door Coffee House, Calvary Methodist Church, 300 Massachusetts Ave., Arlington on Saturday, April 20, at 7:30 p.m. Hunter's folk songs draw upon his seventh generation rural Missouri upbringing and have been recorded by Kathy Mattea, Don Williams and Uicky Skaggs. Home baked cookies, desserts and coffee are available. Tickets are \$8. Doors open at 6:45. Tickets may be purchased at the door or reserved by phone at 646-9679.

EVENTS, see page 7B

### LUIGI'S LUNCH



Despite having the equipment sold at auction to pay off debts of the previous owner, Luigi and Tony Musto have been running the shop for nearly a year. They continue to operate on Broadway Plaza. Mimi Roberto and Tony Musto have been running the shop for nearly a year for the building's landlord, who ended up getting the equipment at the public auction last month.

## MOVIE LISTINGS

Arlington Capitol Theatre  
204 Massachusetts Ave.  
648-4340 (listings)

April 12-18

- UP CLOSE & PERSONAL (PG-13) — 11:45, 2:10, 4:35, 7:05 and 9:35
- ALL DOGS HEAVEN 2 (G) — 11:30, 1:10 and 2:50
- RUMBLE IN THE BRONX (R) — 5:25, 7:20 and 9:15
- MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS (PG) — 1:20, 4:05, 7:45
- GEORGIA (R) — 4:55, 7:10 and 9:35
- THINGS TO DO IN DENVER (R) — 7:15
- BROKEN ARROW (R) — 9:40
- MUPPET TREASURE ISLAND (G) — 11:30, 1:25, 3:20, 5:15
- BABE (G) — 11:30, 1:20, 3:10, 5:05 and 6:55
- LEAVING LAS VEGAS (R) — 1:30, 3:10, 7:15 and 9:30

Tonight only:

- TOY STORY (G) — 11:30, 1:10 and 2:50
- FRENCH TWIST (R) — 1:30, 3:05, 9:45



# The Battle of Menotomy

BATTLE, from page 5B.

column to follow her mother's cow that was in her care. No harm came to her or the cow. The older men of Menotomy, the ones exempt from military service because of age — many of them veterans of the French and Indian War — watched in frustration as Percy and his 1,200 men passed by. They were too many to do anything about.

## Wagon ambush

The exempts were heartened, however, when a mounted messenger from Cambridge told them that supply wagons were approaching under a small guard. The wagons had been held up until the wagon guard replaced the torn-up plank on the bridge that they used to cross the Charles River. They stationed themselves behind a wall, and when the convoy was about to go past them, David Lamson, the leader, having first ordered his men to aim at the horses, called out to the drivers to surrender, who replied by whipping up their teams. The exempts fired, killing several horses, two

men, and wounding others.

Percy's reinforcements reached Col. Smith's exhausted men at the nick of time. They were almost out of ammunition and about to panic. After setting up a temporary camp around the Munroe Tavern in Lexington to provide rest for the men and to treat the wounded, the march resumed. The original contingent, under Col. Smith, was placed at the front; while the fresh troops were used on both flanks and at the rear, where they used cannon to keep the minutemen at bay. Although the firing from the minutemen was intense at first, the flanking parties were ruthless, and after some time, it was beginning to seem to the regulars that the worst was over.

## Battle of Menotomy

As they approached Menotomy, however, it became clear that a big fight was looming. Percy must have had difficulty believing his eyes when he passed over the slope across from Foot of the Rocks and looked down on the plain of Menotomy. It had been only a few hours since he passed

through the empty village, but now, in the words of Galvin, "there were as many minutemen and militia waiting for him in Menotomy as there were to his rear and on his flanks. Two thousand provincial soldiers were now riding herd on him, and 2,000 more had stationed themselves between his column and Boston."

You can imagine the activity that had been going on in our town on that afternoon. Hundreds of minutemen on both sides of Concord Road (Massachusetts Avenue) sought what they thought to be the best firing positions. Some positioned themselves on the high ground on the south side, while others found places along Mill Brook to conceal themselves. There was no overall leadership, and many of the men did not know about the flanking parties. This is what caused a great tragedy to occur later at the Jason Russell house. The battle of the day was about to begin. The colonial troops, then deployed in Menotomy, were going "to be in undisciplined, three columns of redcoats — one down the road and one on each flank."

## Why Menotomy?

But why Menotomy? Why was

our town destined to bear the brunt of the day's fighting? The answer goes back more than 100 years before then, to Capt. George Cooke's mill. To make it possible for farmers from far-off places to bring their grain to the mill, Watertown Road (Pleasant Street) and Woburn Road (Mystic Street) were constructed. As Galvin says, "...all roads led to Menotomy when

the purpose was to intercept the British." The towns that sent minutemen to Menotomy that day included Beverly, Danvers, Salem, Lynn, Cambridge, Medford, Watertown, Rostock, Newton, Framingham, Westford, Concord, Dedham, Needham — and almost every town suffered some casualties.

The men on both sides of the road waited. They could hear the cannon and the musket-firing coming closer. They could see smoke from burning houses. Percy had no intention of marching through Menotomy without clearing every building in his way. A deposition from a British officer notes that Col. Smith's men (who were leading the way) "...were now obliged to force almost every house, for the rebels had taken possession of them and galled us exceedingly, but they suffered for their temerity, for all that we found in the houses were put to death."

Tufts Tavern was the first build-

ing in Menotomy to be stormed by Col. Smith's advance party. They set the building on fire after helping themselves to whatever fancied them.

## Russell's return

When Jason Russell returned from taking his family to safety, he found men from Danvers, Needham, Beverly, Lynn, and Dedham on or near his property. They had taken up positions there, even though they had been warned by more experienced men that their position was too exposed. Ammi Cutter, who had already seen action in the capture of the supply wagons, tried to tell Russell, who was 58 years old and lame, that this was no place for an old man.

Russell's reply was, "An Englishman's house is his castle," and continued to improve his position. It was not much later when flankers surprised these men, who at first repulsed them, but when additional flankers rushed over, the minutemen withdrew, and had nowhere to go but to Russell's house. Some tried to surrender, but it was too late. They "...were butchered with savage barbarity," according to a Danvers man who survived. Russell, the last man to enter the house, was shot twice and bayoneted several times. The fight inside the house was brutal. Trapped on the first floor, two men from Lynn leaped out of a window. One was shot, but the other got away. In all, the regulars killed 12 men — seven from Danvers, and others from Lynn, Salem, and Needham — but they were not able to get at the men from Beverly, who made it to the cellar. This fight at the Jason Russell house was the single bloodiest encounter of the day. Luckily for us today, the flankers did not have time to set it afire. It is now the headquarters of the Arlington Historical Society.

## The battle rages

Just about that time, flankers seemed to appear from nowhere to force other Danvers men toward Spy Pond. With the pond behind them, flankers on one side, and the main body approaching on the other, they desperately ran across the road in front of the main body to escape. Somehow, they eluded the flankers on the other side before

the battle moved on.

The battle raged all over Menotomy. A regular lost his life to a Roxbury man, Dr. Duxbury, in a desperate bayonet fight. Lt. Solomon Bowman of the Menotomy minutemen, who had no bayonet, found himself face-to-face with a regular. Using his musket as a club, he knocked the regular down and took him prisoner. The most interesting and exciting story of the day, however, is about 80-year-old Samuel Whittemore, who acted as if he wanted to stop the regulars all by himself. Taking his two pistols, saber, and musket, he chose a spot behind a stone wall that put him in the path of a flanking party. Whittemore, waiting until the flankers came close, fired his musket — killing one of them. He jumped up, firing his pistols, and succeeded in killing at least one more, before a musket ball hit him in the face. As the minutemen with him pulled back, several regulars leaped over the wall and bayoneted him over and over. The happy end to this story is that Whittemore, even though bayoneted 13 times, and with half his face shot away, survived and lived to be 98 years old. He is quoted as saying that he would do the same thing again, if need be.


The British did quite a bit of mischief in Thomas Russell's store. After finding that the minutemen hiding there had fled, they are reported to have left the molasses and liquor barrel taps running, after first destroying whatever they could. A short distance down the road from where the flankers left Whittemore was Cooper's Tavern. This the regulars plastered with musket balls to cover a search party who found and killed two unarmed Menotomy citizens, Jason Winslip and Jabez Wyman. Next came the Black Horse Tavern, the last building that they had to clear before marching over the Menotomy River (Alewife Brook) into Cambridge.

By this time, it was almost dusk. It had been a long day for Menotomy people; a great day, as it turned out, a day that we are sure they never forgot. We should not forget, either.

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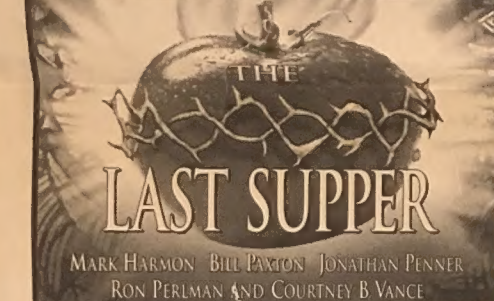


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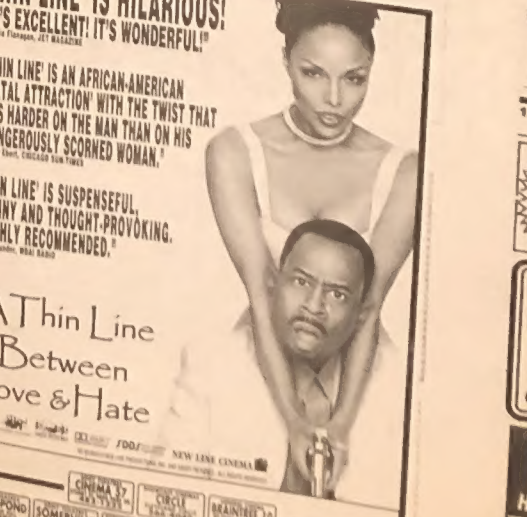
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